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The meaning of mysticism

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BY

WOODBRIDGE RILEY, Ph.D.

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I

WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

I

WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

True mysticism is a work of art. Like a bit of old stained glass, an illuminated missal, a piece of fine carving, it is at once simple and noble. It needs no praise; it is its own proof of excellence. Plato or Suso, Tauler or Ruysbroeck, Edwards or Woolman—ancient Greece, medieval Europe, modern America—whatever the name or place all flash out as facets of a stone of the first water.

There is a quality in all this that needs only to be known to be appreciated. Yet to know the true from the false is sometimes difficult. A bit of modern glass can be told from the old, a colored reproduction from the bright vellum, a plaster copy from the genuine stone, the difference of quality in these extreme cases is not hard to seek. But just as there are "antiques" which are not old, and yet can deceive the new rich, so there are imitations of mystic literature which do deceive people like the adherents of "new thought." A rhapsody put in scriptural language, adorned with obsolete words is no more genuine mysticism than a piece of period furniture which has been weathered on the roof of a factory. There are factories of fake thought just as there are factories of fake furniture. There are mysticisms which borrow the aspects of Plato or Plotinus; they seem real in the dim light of some secret séance, but what a difference in the morning light of criticism. So we shall find it is possible to test any proper fragment of alleged mystic lore and see how the paint peels off, the veneer cracks and all the camouflage disappears.

To turn then from the false to the true. Mysticism is a movement which is world wide and world old. It ranges from Plato to pragmatism, from the vision of the archetypes to the ether dreams cited by William James. In general it denotes a reaction from the head to the heart. It stands for a religious revolt against rationalism, for a tendency to abandon logic for sentiment. The slow and painful steps of ratiocination give way to the immediate tasting of supernal joys; in short, mysticism is the scholastic of the heart, the dialectic of the feeling. Unfortunately most people seem to identify mysticism with the mysterious and to confuse it with the occult. They put under the term anything from the mystic maze at Coney Island to the spirit photographs of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The word, it is true, was originally derived from the ancient mysteries and traced to the root which means the closed mouth. At the time of the Eleusinian cult it connoted a secret language and a ritual understood only by the initiated. The same thing obtains in a measure nowadays. History repeats itself and we meet with the irritating complacency of those who pretend to have a monopoly of this or that form of current occultism or so-called "New Thought." "O you don't understand," they say, with a superior Mona Lisa smile. You are not "In Tune With the Infinite"; you are not a "Dweller on the Threshold"; you have not joined the "Circle of Unity."

This is as silly as the hocus pocus and air of mystery thrown about Greek letter societies—performances fit only for high school students or callow college freshmen. The mysteries of such cults are no more mysterious than the secrets of the fraternal orders. One might as well speak of the thirty-second degree in the understanding of the drama or the opera and yet some people talk in this fashion: "I have read Shakespeare and understand him. You can't understand him. I have heard the 111th sonata of Beethoven and you can never get his spirit. I have listened to the Ring at Beyreuth, but you can never enter the magic circle of perfect Wagnerites."

Shakespeare, Beethoven, Wagner—admirers of these men's works did not begin in any mysterious way. They happened to like the thing and took to it naturally. Practice made perfect and appreciation grew as a matter of course. So with genuine mysticism. The literature of the subject may be vast, but it is possible to take the first step and not halt on the threshold. There are no secret passwords or mysterious mutterings necessary to open the door.

The mystic circle forms no exclusive society; it is not a close corporation; it is not a limited fraternity. All mystics of whatever creed or clime are brethren of the common life. But the false mystics still flourish and like silly sophomores require a strict probation on the part of the freshmen. To this they add absurd rites of initiation, the learning of long formulas, the uttering of windy incantations. They mix the language of Paracelsus, Hegel, and a half-baked Buddhism and demand that the neophyte should learn all this high hocus pocus out of expensive booklets.

To be acceptable to the Purple Mother or to some strange Father in God, one must dwell long at Point Loma or at some retreat on the banks of the Hudson. In some cases the family must be abandoned, the reason abjured, the check book handed over: "Become as little children so that 'Mother' can take care of your cash or 'Father' pick your little savings bank." This pious assumption of parental authority is no fancy picture—commercialized mysticism is a fact, but the victims seldom whimper. They have invested their material and mental savings in transcendental oil wells and the wells have not been as successful as the promoters.

It is a relief to turn from this sorry picture to the lives and practices of genuine mystics. Those men were advocates of the simple life; they did not ride around in four-horse chariots or whatever was the equivalent of the modern limousine. If they did not seek poverty, in many cases they suffered it. None of them were famous for their bank accounts or for erecting churches whose corner stones were laid by themselves and bore their own names. Their motto was not: accumulate and let the public judge of our success by our wealth. They preferred the simple life and their motto was generally "Do without." Some may have been too ascetic, but their general attitude was one of indifference to worldly goods. Thus the original Quaker simplicity was not an affectation, but an outward sign of something real within—that singleness of heart which betokens a genuine search for the interior or hidden life.

Commercialized mysticism has its sordid side. It also has its ridiculous side. It offers not a five-foot book shelf of secret knowledge, but a five-inch book shelf. It spends not hours with the mystics, but minutes with the mystics. Its advertisements read in the familiar fashion: "Pick out the man who has read fifteen minutes a day from our wonderful pamphlet entitled, 'How to control the Solar Plexus.' Notice his smile, his engaging air, his dominating personality. Contrast with him the man who has *not* read our wonderful pamphlet. Notice his frown, his downcast look, his air of being out of the social circle. Look on this figure and then on that and then decide what is wrong with this picture."

All this is silly and superficial, but it exists. Go to any large department store and ask for books on mysticism and they will offer you books bearing such titles as these, "How to Strengthen Your Will," "How to Make Microbes," Mrs. Towne's "Silence Exercises" and the like. By means of such apparatus adults can do their daily dozen in mental gymnastics. Meanwhile they can gaze at wall mottoes reading "Peace," "Power Through Repose," "There Is Only One Presence and One Power in the Universe—the Good Omnipotent." Then, too, children can drop their toys and read "Wee Wisdom's Way"; they can abandon their fairy tales and absorb "Love's Roses" and "Sir Smile-Ups." Or to leave the narrow limits of the home you can go out in the wide, wide world and join an "Evolutive Education Center" and learn "How to transcend Man's accumulative book-learned spiritual and philosophical obscurantisms." Or lastly you can join a correspondence course, pay your subscriptions to the "Home of Truth" and in three weeks master "Thinking: Its Science and Its Art"; "Speech: Its Science and Its Art"; "Action: Its Science and Its Art."

If these things cost too much in money or in time you can, in a few rare cases, gain spiritual profit in other and cheaper ways. If you cannot afford the book entitled, "All Suffering in All Things," you can absorb for nothing a "Prosperity Thought Held Daily at 12 M"; or as a last resort you can partake of the general benefits of "National Joy Week," for the organizers of the

New Joy Movement have followed in the footsteps of the California fruit growers who have declared a "National Prune Week."

Such are some of the books, pamphlets, wall mottoes, correspondence courses and slogans taken from the recent literature of the New Thoughters. And such are the activities the public too often identifies with genuine mysticism. The organizations back of these activities range all the way from the "League of the Larger Life," the "Circle for Inner Life," to the "School of the Builders" which teaches you that "your mind is the magnet that attracts to you the things you want." Through these organizations one may attend "Success Lectures," talks on "The Mystery of the Self," "Glorious and Golden Hours."

Against this flimsy background historic mysticism stands out in bold relief. The interior or hidden life—ancient, medieval and modern—has powerful representatives. Their works need only to be cited to show that a common current unites them, that all are carried forward on a steady stream of common feeling. For the spirit of classical antiquity we quote this passage from Plotinus: After showing that the soul is incorporeal because of her kinship with the divine he proceeds as follows:

"The soul must be therefore considered only after abstraction of foreign things, or rather, he who makes this abstraction should observe himself in that condition. He then will not doubt that he is immortal, when he sees himself in the pure world of intelligence. He will see his intelligence occupied, not in the observation of some sense-object that is mortal, but in thinking the eternal by an equally eternal faculty. He will see all the entities in the intelligible world, and he will see himself become intelligible, radiant, and illuminated by the truth emanating from the Good, which sheds the light of truth on all intelligible entities. Then, like Empedocles he will have the right to say: 'Farewell, I am now an immortal divinity.' For he has ascended to the divinity, and has become assimilated thereto. As purification permits one to know the better things, so the notions we have within us, and which constitute real science, are made clear. Indeed, it is not by an excursion among external objects that the soul attains the intuition of wisdom and virtue, but by re-entering into herself, in thinking herself in her primitive condition. Then she clears up and recognizes in herself the divine statues, soiled by the rust of time. Likewise, if a piece of gold were animated and released itself from the earth by which it was covered, after first having been ignorant of its real nature because it did not see its own splendor, it would admire itself when considering itself in its purity; it would find that it had no need of a borrowed beauty, and would consider itself happy to remain isolated from everything else."

For a medieval representative we may have recourse to Meister Eckhart, the thirteenth century thinker of the Rhine Valley when he declares "God is alike near in all creatures. I have a power in my soul which enables me to perceive God; I am certain as that I live that nothing is so near to me as God. He is nearer to me than I am to myself. It is a part of His very essence that He should be nigh and present to me. God is in all things and places alike, and is ever ready to give Himself to us in so far as we are ready to receive Him; he knows God aright who sees Him in all things."

A final passage gives a comparatively modern expression of the sweet reasonableness of a Quaker mystic, John Woolman, of the Province of New Jersey. He writes in his journal, "There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names; it is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion, nor excluded from any, when the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, they become brethren."

Taken from the third, the thirteenth and the eighteenth centuries, these chance quotations show the common spirit of the mystic way. They all agree in their high aims and in the results of their endeavor. Briefly put these are as follows:

To grasp the divine essence or ultimate reality of things; to enjoy the blessedness of actual communion with the Highest; to understand the supreme, all-pervading, indwelling power in whom or in which all things are; to achieve the practical possibility of connecting this force with this Being of Beings; to gain intercourse not by external media, for example, historic revelations and oracles or ceremonies, but by ecstatic transfusion or identification, whereby God or the Absolute or Principle or Essence ceases to be an object and becomes an experience.

Such are the phrases current among the mystics, uttered by men who speak a common language. But these phrases are perhaps so general, so ambiguous, that they may lead to two attitudes of misapprehension. There are the tough-minded who deride "knowledge above knowledge" and say there is nothing in it because they have had no experience of it. Against such the objection might be brought that they might as well deride music because they have no music in their souls. The other attitude is that of the tender-minded who say that mysticism is everything and will explain everything. Against such the counter charge can be brought that mysticism is not merely occultism, that the interior or hidden life is not necessarily connected with the control of outward objects like health or wealth.

These are the attitudes of misapprehension; the attitude of understanding is more objective. It recognizes in mysticism a lyric strain. As there have been great lyric poets so there have been great poets of the soul. This attitude is taken by William James, the psychologist, who gives what is perhaps the clearest diagnosis of the case in his famous Gifford Lectures. Here he confesses that, although his own constitution shuts him out from the employment of mystical states almost entirely, and though forced to look upon the subject so externally, nevertheless, he thinks that he shall at least succeed in convincing his hearers of the reality of the states in question, and of the paramount importance of their function.

So reviewing the literature of the subject he gives his famous marks of mysticism. These are four in number: "Ineffability,—the subject of it immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words,—in this peculiarity mental states are more like states of feeling than like states of intellect. The poetic quality,—although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to be states of knowledge; they are states of insight, illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain. Transiency,—mystical states cannot be sustained for long, their quality can be but imperfectly reproduced in memory, yet this is susceptible of continuous development in what is felt as inner richness and importance. Passivity,—the oncoming of mystical states can be facilitated by preliminary voluntary operations, yet when the characteristic sort of consciousness has once set in, the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance."

To this well-known modern psychological analysis should be added the description of the mystic progression as given in the ancient manuals. Here there are three stages in the ladder of perfection: "First, the purgative, brought about by contrition and amendment; then, the illuminative produced by concentration of all the faculties upon God; lastly, the intuitive or unitive, wherein man beholds God face to face and is joined to Him in perfect union."

II

THE PAGAN PREPARATION

II

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Such is the case of the defense, the definitions of mysticism given by their advocates and supplemented by their own words. Over against this should be put the statements of the hostile critic. It is the latter, in the language of Robert Vaughan in his "Hours with the Mystics," who presents these charges against the mystics: "That they are enthusiasts with their visions; pretended prophets with their claims of inspiration; wonder workers with theurgic formulas; philosophers who believe themselves organs of the world's soul, and their systems an evolution of deity."

To these misconceptions we shall return later. Meanwhile with these various points, positive and negative, we have the critical apparatus for determining the worth of historic mysticism. Nevertheless, there is one charge that should be met at the start and that is the unpracticality of the cult. This can be met both by particulars and in a general way. For instance take three specific cases in our own land. John Woolman talked often of divine intuition and "spiritual frames," at the same time he gave most practical advice towards the undermining of slavery—"That great building, slowly erected in wrong." Again William Penn wrote his book entitled "No Cross, No Crown" and was willing to go to the Tower for his views. He also founded Philadelphia as a practical harbor of refuge for the persecuted and oppressed. Finally Jonathan Edwards, the Puritan "Saint of New England," generally accounted among the most speculative of dreamers, actually gave the most practical advice for the employment of colonial troops in the expedition against Louisburg. Particular points like this are often forgotten. They are to be supplemented by the general practicality of mysticism. Though one may be without any experience of the interior or hidden life, may balk at "vision without comprehension," yet, in a broad way, the subject can be understood as filling an actual demand, a felt need of the human soul. Such an attitude, at any rate, furnishes the proper approach to the rise of mysticism in its historical setting.

To this setting in the western world we now have recourse, not in what is called "a spirit of piety with its face fixed on the past," but in a spirit of disinterested curiosity, with the aim of understanding a difficult subject. The prime difficulty lies in steering a straight course amid conflicting currents of influence. Here the safe mean lies between sentimentalism and skepticism. Some say that the early Christian mysticism was nothing but a continuity of pagan thought; others that the mysticism of classical antiquity was nothing but a medley of Orphic, Pythagorean, and Eleusinian mysteries. The last statement is unjust, for such men as Epaminondas, Pericles and Plato were severally interested, if not inspired, by these movements. But the guiding thread into this obscure world of thought is hard to find, unless one seeks in the Platonic Dialogues certain hints of antique lore which were carried on into the future. Such hints are manifestly found in the Phaedo. In this famous discussion on the immortality of the soul certain doctrines are evolved which had a profound influence on the later development of the movement. In this dialogue Socrates teaches that the soul is the gift of God; that being intrinsically a superior element it is encumbered by the body. Or as Socrates asks

Simmias: "Is it not by reasoning that the soul embraces truth? And does it not reason better than before when 'tis not encumbered by seeing or hearing, pain or pleasure? When shut up within itself, it bids adieu to the body, and entertains as little correspondence with it as possible, and pursues the knowledge of things without touching them."

Here is an early hint of the mind's power of abstraction—that power which a later Platonizer, Philo the Jew, calls a philosophic effort leading to that beatific vision which brings one nearest to God. Plato's influence on the church was so great that later he was patronizingly called a Christian unconscious of his Christianity. To this one might retort that he who said this was a Platonist unconscious of his Platonism, for the very vocabulary of Christian mysticism was borrowed from the Academy.

The historian of philosophy recognizes these positive influences; he also recognizes other influences by their very negations. These are the two later developments of Stoicism and Epicureanism, the one emphasizing duty, the other pleasure, yet neither satisfying the soul in its ultimate quest. Duty and pleasure are opposite angles of a triangle whose base rests on the earth;

they form real parts but not the whole of that complete figure whose apex points towards the celestial vision. These movements in themselves are not to be despised. As Mayor has pointed out, they were safeguards against changes in Greek life—the conquests of Alexander which shook the old Greek law of the state, and the influence of oriental thought which shook the old Greek religion. So the problem was to find some substitute for the lost religion and some restraint against the rule of brute force brought in by the over-lordship of Macedonia and Rome.

Such was the historic setting. In the case of Stoicism the rigors of its system were obviously extreme. It taught that the individual is under iron necessity; that man is a puppet in a show where Fate pulls the strings. By consequence, under extreme duress, the individual is justified in a cold-blooded resignation to self-annihilation. This, it should be noted, is a far cry from the kindly humane spirit of Plato, for as Socrates declares to Cebes, though the soul in essence be separate from the body, man has no right to bring about that separation, for "God has put us in this life, as in a post which we cannot quit without His leave."

Justification of suicide is the breaking point of Stoicism. Its strong point is its cosmopolitan spirit. Zeno's prophecy for the future was for one life and one world, when all men were to be looked upon as countrymen and fellow citizens; one united flock guided by a common law. This reminds one of the mystic brotherhood, the fellowship of the brethren of the common life, a noble ideal to be contrasted with that sorry ideal of individual mysticism where the selfish seeker after the supreme unity withdraws from the world and its duties, a false ideal probably more common in the East than the West.

Such is Stoicism in its strength and its weakness, in its points of contact and of difference with the coming mysticism. A similar comparison can be made with the contrasting doctrines of Epicureanism. Here instead of the Stoic severity with its attitude towards external good and evil as matters of indifference, its teaching of man as the master of circumstance who holds that the things in our power are the passions, affections, desires and aversions—in place of this system, designed to strengthen the governing reason, we have the system of Epicurus. Here men are treated as if they were moral invalids, valetudinarians in regard to virtue, seekers after the bovine life of undisturbedness, of keeping one's sensations unspoiled by too much thinking—a shallow and meager doctrine, the extreme of that speculative spectrum whose other end is self-sacrifice. Cicero in his letter to Monoeceus refers to the "swinish doctrines of Epicurus," perhaps too harsh a term, yet expressing the popular attitude towards these ethical lotus eaters.

All this indirectly prepared the way for the more serious side of life, the mystic quest which through contrition and amendment concentrates all the forces of the soul upon the supernatural object. And this helps to the understanding of the ancient mysticism at the beginning of the Christian era, as a kind of mosaic of the times. Like the lapidary work of the period the mental cross section of the first century formed a pattern of great intricacy. The major philosophical systems furnished the frame-work or border, the various popular beliefs the raw materials to be set in a pattern of the age. For one thing the Greek religion was as composite as the medley of tribes which made up the race. The stock ideas ranged from the abstract ideas of Plato to the mercenary appeals to the Gods of the lower world, the underground deities whose favor must be gained by sacrifice and ascetic practices. "Sinning and praying, praying and sinning, we go on our way," as Socrates sarcastically observed.

Platonism did not satisfy because it was too high in the heavens, because it sought metaphysical means to reach the empyrean. Nor did the worship of Chthonic or underground powers satisfy, because there were too many shrines to visit, too many jealous Gods to appease. Of the various cults—Orphic, Pythagorean, Eleusinian—each offered the way of salvation, but there were too many detours on this road map. Then, too, the incoming cults of the East complicated the problem. The various oriental societies of salvation only confused men's minds. The back wash of the conquests of Alexander brought in a veritable flotsam and jetsam of speculation. Persian dualism, with its conflict between good and evil, between the rival powers Ahriman and Ormuzd; the doctrines of the Essenes with their emanations and asceticisms; and possibly Esoteric Buddhism and the veritable sacred books of the East with their doctrines of pessimism, renunciation and world illusion, all this complex of systems was offered in that world mart of metaphysics—Alexandria. To these, of course, were added the local worships, from that of the veiled Isis to that of mummified crocodiles and cats.

With all these things in the air—and some of them must have literally polluted the atmosphere —there arose a kind of mental nightmare which oppressed the thinker. Out of this we leave the teachings of the Apocrypha with their sterile legalisms and impossible apocalypses, yet all these influences colored the thought of the times. It is then astonishing to find one thinker who thought straight amid all this confusion. There was an immense activity and variety of thought in the half century preceding the Christian era. Still at the beginning of this era we find one man who traced out a fairly clear path of mystic illumination. Philo Judaeus prepared the way for the greater Alexandrian Plotinus. He took the stock ideas of the times and fashioned them into a scheme which has much that is comprehensible. At the least he furnished that pantheistic framework into which Plotinus, two centuries later, fitted a gorgeous picture of the imagination. His supreme God is the creator of all, permeates all, and sustains all life, for without Him our soul cannot exist a single day. While to Philo the Master and Ruler of all holds the universe together in such a manner as to be insoluble, yet Philo asks "Who is the heir of divine things?" and answers, "The wise take God for their teacher and those who are less perfectly initiated in wisdom take the wise men for theirs."

With the word initiation the esoteric element of Alexandrian thought enters in. This is both Jewish and Greek. By a combination of two ethnic elements a construction is sought by which to bridge the chasm of the unknowable. On the one side is the Hebraic Jehovah whose "word is the food of retirement and solitude"; on the other, the Greek Logos or Word, which is offered as a mediator between God and man. In Egypt, then, is sought a practical application of the ancient doctrine of the Logos. The term had been used as far back as Heracleitus, four centuries before, as that reason which rules all things. The task is now to grasp the term and use it as a tool. The practical Jew attempts this and seeks thereby to reach divine wisdom commonly considered to be far removed beyond the reach of human knowledge and aspiration. Such in brief is the Hellenized Judaism which prepared for the purer Hellenism of Plotinus. But Plotinus in turn was indebted to Philo in teaching that salvation was to be reached by the renunciation of the senses and that its end was the ecstatic vision.

Now in both these men there is a common element and a common contrast to the Christian doctrines which ran parallel to their systems. In both the complaint and the cure were intellectual and metaphysical rather than ethical and spiritual. The intellectual quest of quietism is then the key to the effort of the founder of Neo-Platonism. That system had been called a hybrid between West and East, having a Greek father and an Egyptian mother. That is a truer statement than one which would reduce Neo-Platonism to a mere echo of the far East. As a matter of recent investigation it may be shown that the Greek preparation went on without the interference of the remoter oriental thought. The old school of searchers after sources—relying upon the statements of the early church fathers—went so far as to derive all the systems of Greek thought from the orient; they accepted the influence of India as actual, that of Persia as probable, that of China as possible. But all this is an impossible theory. Emerson may have believed that "all goes back to the East"; that Pythagoras and Gautama Buddha were one and the same. But despite caravan routes and the ancient interpenetration of nations these assertions cannot be proved. One might as well argue for traces of New England Puritanism in the Punjab because a copy of Jonathan Edwards was left behind by some pious skipper from New Bedford. We have been led to swallow the saying that the Western philosophy came originally from the East because of the claims of certain Swamis recently visiting our shores. But the question remains—from how far East? There may have been Yankee beachcombers left on India's coral strand, but they probably influenced the East as little as casual traders from Ormuz or of India influenced the western world of Hellenism.

To return. Plotinus strikes us as of the Greeks, Greek, and his system a logical development towards an Hellenic form of mysticism. If this be so, it betokens our debt to classical antiquity, for Neo-Platonism, as a development of Platonism, furnishes the very terms and turns of thought without which the mysticism of the Latin church would have been inarticulate. Plotinus, the third century founder of Neo-Platonism, was a teacher at Rome for twenty-five years and his pupils were of all classes up to the Emperor Gallienus. From the Enneads, a series of nine writings published by his disciple Porphyry, we obtain this scheme of the search after the divine sagacity. As theoretical it deals with the celestial origin of the human soul and shows how it fell from its high estate. As practical it points out the way by which the soul may return to its original home, the eternal and supreme. The scheme, or working model of this system, may be represented by a series of concentric circles, like ripples in a pond when a stone is thrown in. Each lower stage is united, through all the higher stages, with the original point or One. Everything is brought forth by the One, yet the derived beings are not like the original beings, but are subject to the law of diminishing completeness. The world is the express image of the first Being, but the further the line of successive progression is carried, the smaller is the share in existence.

Neo-Platonism is evidently the half-way house in the history of western mysticism. The first stage in the journey is offered by Plato, whose system of creation from the Demiurge, or creator and Father of all things, down to animals inhabiting their proper elements—air, water, or earth—represents a true scale of being. The stage beyond Neo-Platonism is represented by the mysticism of the medieval church which echoes the very thought of Plotinus. It, too, has its stages of existence, its lower and higher realm of mystic endeavor, all summed up in the *scala perfectionis* —that ladder of perfection up which the seekers after supernal joys toiled by painful steps and slow.

Plotinus is a mediator between the earlier Hellenic and later Romanic systems. This characteristic passage from the Enneads with his talk of archetype and hypostasis would show this double aspect. Seeking to solve the problem of the first emanation or raying out from the One or Supreme, Plotinus proceeds as follows: "How is this accomplished and how are we to think of this second hypostasis that surrounds the abiding and changeless essence of the One? We are to think of it as a radiance proceeding from the One, and from the One abiding in its changelessness, just as the light about and surrounding the sun is eternally generated from it, without any change or motion in the solar substance. Indeed all things while they last necessarily give of their own power an hypostasis proceeding from their own essence, outside of and surrounding them, and attached to them—an image as it were of the archetypes which have brought it forth."

All this seems strange and foreign to the modern mind. In an age which uses the terms of evolution the process of creation is put in terms of the process of becoming—natural selection, through the struggle for existence, resulting in a survival of the fittest. From Darwin's "Origin of Species" to Bergson's "Creative Evolution" we think opposite to the antique way—from below upward, not from above downward. With most of us the path of ascent lies through the material realm, from mineral to man. But the problem to the Platonist and the Neo-Platonist was the direct antithesis of this. Granting the existence of base matter and of man, "the most religious of animals," how is it that man himself has fallen from his high state; how is it that with his lofty aspirations he is unable to satisfy his search for perfection? The answer, according to Plotinus, is that man is a dual creature, feeling two natures struggling within him. As an ideal soul, partaking of the world soul, he belongs in essence and destination to the upper or intelligible world. But as a soul enmeshed in matter he can also turn aside to the sensual and lose himself in the finite. Man is then Janus-faced; on his immortal side he represents unity and harmony, on his mortal strife and discord.

Such is the theoretical, now for the practical philosophy of Plotinus. Human souls which have descended into the corporeal have allowed themselves to be ensnared by sensuality. This is a false existence, but conversion is still possible. By the same steps by which it fell the soul must retrace its course back to God. It must return to itself by the practice of virtue, which aims at likeness to God. In this return there is a graduated scale of virtue. The lowest is the civil, the next the purifying, or ascetic, the highest the divine. Purification means this: "Shake off sin, become more spiritual and at last you may become divine." This final stage is reached through contemplation of the Principle, Being, the One, in other words the ecstatic approach. But thought, being motion, is only a preliminary step towards God. Therefore only in perfect passivity can the soul reach God. The spiritual curriculum can be summed up in three steps; first, contemplate corporeal things in their harmony; next, contemplate the soul in its unity; lastly, strive to approach the Nous and thereby the One.

Platonism, as the essence of pagan antiquity, reaches high water mark in mysticism. But the tide soon turned and left behind strange débris. With the death of the master Plotinus his followers soon fell into perversions and extravagances. Hypatia of Alexandria, with her high learning and her tragic fate, represents the dying glory of that form of faith; but even in Plotinus' time ignorant distortions of the doctrine crept in.

Even Porphyry, the master's own disciple, degenerated from the quest of the ecstatic vision and fell into the crudest doctrines of demonology, of commerce with the spirits of the under world. This might be called a perverted pluralism. Yet, in conclusion, it should be remembered that genuine Neo-Platonism taught the doctrine of the One and the Good; it was monistic and optimistic and so in harmony with the genuine mysticism of the West.

III

ROMANIC MYSTICISM

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ROMANIC MYSTICISM

"There is one river of truth which receives tributaries from every side." This statement of Clement furnishes a figure for the development of mysticism in the Romanic period. The early church received but a light infiltration of Neo-Platonism, for the opposition of St. Augustine diverted the current of tradition. But by the fifth century a fuller stream came in from the far East. This was through the teaching of the pseudo-Dionysius, so-called because masquerading as Dionysius the Areopagite, reputed convert of St. Paul at Athens. Thus the waters were muddied by the nihilism of India for Dionysius brings in those negative elements which did so much to hinder the flow of a genuine mysticism. The Book of the Hidden Mysteries of Divinity would turn the Infinite into the Indefinite and would therefore reach the deity by wiping out all distinctions. This means that only by stripping off the attributes, one by one, can the absolute be obtained. It is the familiar argument that if God be just, He cannot be merciful; if He be merciful He cannot be just. These attributes contradict one another, so, it is argued, they should be dropped, and if two are contradictory, all are contradictory, therefore all should be dropped. Consequently, all definition being negation, no definition should be attempted.

The fallacy of this form of reasoning is obvious. It is as if one should say: to grasp the meaning of government, get rid of its constituent parts; to understand the Union, strip off the States, and leave the Union as such, now and forever, one and indivisible.

Truth reached by abstraction is a pernicious principle and in its practical aspects this negative method had notoriously evil results. It was well meant, but ill conceived. It is one thing, in all humility, to say that the Infinite transcends definition; it is another to say, as does Dionysius, that the mystic must leave behind all things both in the sensible and in the intelligible worlds till he enters into the darkness of nescience.

This is the negative way. It led to those forms of medieval asceticism so repellant to the modern mind—contempt for the body, including mortification of the flesh, flight from the world, including family ties and social duties. Thus there was thought to be spiritual merit in the hair shirt, and value in the statement of Angela of Foligno, who declared that, by the deaths of her mother, husband and children, she was freed from "great obstacles in the way of God."

From such pious heartlessness it is evident that the stream of tradition from Dionysius is a subterranean stream; it leaves the surface with all its sunshine and seeks the depths. Medievalism was much affected by this stream; it cropped up in many places. At times it appears to fertilize the fields, but more often it ruins them. Sometimes it brings forth a Saint Francis of Assisi, who leaves all to follow the Master, but only to turn and love all, for the Saint of Assisi would justly say, like the Ancient Mariner: "He prayeth well, who loveth well, both man and bird and beast."

There are indeed, at rare intervals, certain mystics of the negative way who start with renunciation, yet end with rejoicing over nature itself—this fair apparition that shines about us. But more often the *via negativa* leads from society to solitude, to the sterile anchorite like Saint Anthony, to the advocate of physical suffering for its own sake like Saint Theresa, to another

Spanish extremist like Molinos, enamored of nothing else but Nothing.

The modicum of truth in the negative way is that it leads to the first and necessary stage—the purgative. Now while the purgative, raised to the nth degree, may become absolute denial of the senses, of the emotions, of the intellect itself, yet in this life there is no nth degree unless the monastic life be called such. Still, even here, the self cannot be totally erased. By a kind of perverted piety the crucifiers of the flesh become voluptuaries of suffering and the accounts of their agonies so many itemized bills of credit with the authorities.

How early the stream of orientalized mysticism was canalized by the church it is hard to say. Even in St. Augustine we find traces of a tendency quite alien to the primitive Gospel of joy. The Bishop of Hippo anticipates Dionysius in calling God Ineffable, known by nescience. Furthermore, this theory of negation is matched by the practice of negation, of living by doing without. To one born and bred in the pagan world, whose soul, to use the language of Plato, was perhaps early stained by the false dyes of the senses, the flight from that world led to a simpler and purer life. But the Augustinian ideal seems unnatural and the Confessions themselves at times false in tone. To draw a sharp line between the city of God and the city of this world leads to that lack of civic responsibility so often charged against those who dwell in contemplative abstraction.

To flee this wicked world and leave all behind is the counterpart in practice of the theory of negation. The institution of monachism is its concrete form. To hide in the dens and caves of the desert is symbolic of stripping off externals and of that "night of the soul" when, as Saint Augustine says, "God is best adored in silence; best known by nescience; best described by negatives."

This negative tendency in Patristic mysticism was reinforced by Dionysius. But to be told that the way to reach ultimate reality was to strip off particulars ended up against the blank wall of the abstract universal—high, colorless, apparently unscalable. And yet a scaling ladder was offered, the celestial ladder of the nine-fold order of the heavenly hierarchy. Now in this scheme man is but a little lower than the angels, and with the angels begins that scale of beings running through archangels and principalities up to cherubim and seraphim who are declared to stand at the very vestibule of the Godhead. However, with the given chasm between man and angels, what good does this ladder let down from heaven do? Two answers were given. The church reflected the heavenly hierarchy in the earthly and by signs, symbols, and sacraments, opened up the way of salvation. Then, too, what was writ large in the institution was to be found in miniature in the individual. The solitary mystic may find in his inner experiences—as in a mirror—the celestial ladder. The chief steps are the purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive. Subdivided they represent the nine-fold order of the hierarchy above.

All this seems a mere juggling with the magic number, the sacred triad. Still there was latent in these very manipulations a certain logical possibility. If the celestial ladder be thrice given—in the heavens, in the institution, in the individual—why may not the intermediate reflections, that of the church, be passed over and the solitary soul do without the symbolic ecclesiastical orders? Or still further, why may not even the heavenly hierarchy be disregarded and the soul attain, by its own efforts, direct communion with the highest? These very questions were ever asked by the quietists, from the Brethren of the Free Spirit on the Rhine, to those pietists of Pennsylvania who dwelt in the camps of the solitary.

Such are some of the remoter results of that mystical theology started by Dionysius. This theology was further carried out in the system of John the Scot, known as Erigena. He has been called a great light in the dark ages because he sought to penetrate the unnatural gulf between the world above and the world below. Indeed he declares that "every visible and invisible creature is a theophany or appearance of God" and man, being one of the creatures is thereby a microcosm —a small world reflecting, as in a mirror, the essentials of the macrocosm, or total universe. Such was the message of this early nature mystic. Later his works were condemned as leading to a pantheistic identification of God with man. But this very doctrine, though crushed, was bound to rise again. Thus Erigena became the spiritual father of the later Germanic mystics whose faith was that of those who had lost faith in creeds, sacraments, and ceremonies, and who sought direct knowledge of deity by means of the inner light.

But this is anticipating. After the Patristic and Dark Ages came the great age of the church—the age when the building of cathedrals was matched with the building of systems; the age when the architectural problems were no more intricate than the logical problems in scholastic philosophy. The thirteenth century was thus marked by a valiant attempt to reconcile mysticism and scholasticism. If the problems of stress and strain, of thrust and balance, could be successfully solved in intractable materials, why should not like problems be solved in the airy speculations, the insubstantial categories of the mind? Thomas Aquinas, the master builder of the syllogism, tried this, and out of the materials furnished by the mystics fashioned an extraordinary edifice. The materials indeed lay close at hand. There was St. Bernard of Clairvaux who sought "to weave certain likenesses, and in these to bring the meanings of Divine Wisdom into the sight of the mind, which is contemplating. By this super-human exaltation, above the flesh, one may approach the angelic state." There were the two Victorines, Hugo of St. Victor, who declared that "the way to ascend to God is to descend into one's self," and Richard, who explained that the ascent is "through self, above self." There was likewise Saint Bonaventura who held that "the mind's eye can be fixed on God in such wise that it looks at naught else; yet it will not perceive or see the glory of the light itself, but will rather be raised up into the darkness, and to this knowledge it will be elevated by the removal of all things, as Dionysius says, and he calls this knowledge, 'learned ignorance.' For this knowledge it is, in which the affection is set on fire, as is well known to those who are accustomed to ecstasy. In my opinion this knowledge is to be sought by every just man in this life. If God shall perform aught beyond this, it is a special privilege, not the common law."

Lastly, there was Albertus Magnus who emphasized internal recollections, when the mind is stripped naked of all phantasms and images and simplified and tranquilized in God. "Do not think about the World," he advises, "nor about thy friends, nor about the past, present, or future; but consider thyself to be outside the world and alone with God, as if thy soul were already separated from the body, and had no longer any interest in peace or war, or the state of the world. Leave thy body, and fix thy gaze on the uncreated light."

Such was the mass of material which lay before Aquinas to be carved and fitted into a logical edifice. Some have looked upon the Thomistic system as a mere castle in Spain, rationally constructed, yet of such stuff as dreams are made of. It is more likely that that system utilized the real experiences of a long line of mystics, for this constant and steady insistence upon direct awareness of reality would furnish just the materials with which to build up what was known as the realistic theory of knowledge. This means the possibility of knowing directly those things in themselves generally called intelligible species.

This doctrine is difficult to the modern mind. Yet it can perhaps be made fairly clear by a modern analogy. Consider a moving picture thrown on the screen. This picture arises from a beam of light projected through the darkness. In this beam of light there are tiny images, floating in the air, but not perceived until they are reflected from the screen and thrown into the eyes of the audience. Now simplify this and we get the Thomistic, if not the mystic view of knowledge, and a notion of what are called "impressed" and "expressed" images. When we say that our eyes were "struck by an image," we are using a phrase that still retains the old meaning. Now this image, impressed upon the retina, is not itself perceived, for the eye is not conscious of itself in seeing. No, the impressed image is only perceived when it becomes an expressed image or idea in the intellect. It is just as if, in viewing the moving picture, we looked directly at the lantern. By doing this the screen is eliminated, also the image on the retina, and the mind, by direct vision, perceives the meaning of the message.

This, in a crude figure, may explain the complicated scholastic explanation of the intuitive perceptions of sense so closely akin to the mystic knowledge by direct awareness. If all intermediaries are left out, knowledge becomes immediate. Disembodied souls and angels, by virtue of their state and nature, possess this understanding of spiritual things as they are. Theirs are not impressions by means of the bodily senses, since they have no bodies. But by definition the spiritual and angelic conception resembles the intuitive perceptions of sense. At the same time, such knowledge, being direct, is even higher than knowledge gained by reason. Reason is discursive, it is obliged to go through intermediate steps and by painful processes of logic gain the truth. It is not so with angels and the blessed. They have as their reward the immediate beatific vision of God, as He is. Here God is seen by means of Himself. He Himself is united immediately to the human intellect as an impressed image so that He is both the thing seen and the means by which it is seen.

Lest the attaining of this knowledge, "the light of glory," be cheapened in being made possible to many, Aquinas confines it to a few—to Adam in his state of innocency, to Moses on the Mount, to St. Paul when rapt out of his corporeal senses. And further to safeguard the matter the "angelical doctor" details other ways in which God can communicate truth to man. There is, first, corporeal vision of something real, together with an intellectual light to judge of it; there is, next, imaginary vision, subdivided into visions proper through the eye, and locutions through the ear. But these are hard to distinguish from the images of a lively imagination, from imitations of the devil, or from falsifications and distortions of the senses. There is, finally, an intellectual vision of pure truth without any "phantasms." This is the angelic kind of knowledge.

After all this theory—so potent in the middle ages and after—certain practical questions arise. To take them in reverse order. Is the angelic knowledge confined in this life to but the few traditional characters—Adam, Moses, St. Paul? It would seem not. Contemplation restores to man by grace some measure of that knowledge which Adam had of God before the fall. There was then an "irradiation of the Divine wisdom" which was also received by the gift of the Holy Ghost at baptism.

This admission of Aquinas opened the way for the Sacramentarians, yet the caution is added that here faith causes us to hold the spiritual veiled, as it were, "by a mirror and in a riddle." This qualification led certain later mystics, especially those of the Germanic branch, to doubt the efficacy of the sacraments, and inclined their remote spiritual descendants, such as the Quakers, to rely solely upon the light within.

The third point in the Thomistic summary enlarges the quantity of those who may receive the angelic knowledge. Lest that possibility be too greatly extended the question of quality arises. Are you sure what kind of knowledge you are receiving?—the mystic must ask himself. May not your visions and locutions be mere fanciful images, or imitations, by the Evil One, or distortions of the senses? Such torturing doubts assailed even the adepts and when in doubt they sought the father confessor. The confessional here becomes the check on mystic experience and strange scenes are enacted between those who received visions and locutions and those who were officially put over them to determine if these phenomena were true or false. The police powers of the church are now extended into the innermost recesses of the soul. Armed with an ecclesiastical search warrant the confessor puts the mystic through a kind of spiritual third degree. This is seen in a most vivid way in the counter-reformation. Then the reactionaries, in fighting all that savored of Protestantism, destroyed much that was of the best. They wanted no right of private judgment, no Brethren of the Free Spirit. Hence in rooting out heresy, they uprooted much that was delicate and beautiful.

Their position was paradoxical. They kept St. Theresa with all her morbidities, St. John of the Cross with all his austerities; they rejected Madame Guyon and Molinos, two tragic figures whose vindication lay in their subsequent success as guides to the inner life. The story of the orthodox Spanish mystics is significant as an example of the struggle of the free individual against the fixed institution. Thus St. Theresa's confessors, as directors of the soul, distorted her experiences to fit the framework of preconceived doctrine. This makes it hard to find in her writings the regular stages in the mystic life. She leaves the straight highway which ends in union with God, and strays off into strange by-paths of morbidity and credulity. Truth to her seems to lie even in such phenomena, real and assumed, as sharp pains, dislocation of the bones, levitation or raising of the body from the ground, insensibility or swoon, and catalepsy or apparent death.

These pathological symptoms are supposed to be marks of the value of prayer; they are fictitious values, created, we suspect, by hypnotic suggestions from the confessional, and reinforced by the current preference for outward and visible signs to inward and spiritual gifts. Yet of the inward and spiritual there is a wealth of detail offered by St. Theresa herself. Thus in her earlier book she gives these as the four "degrees" of prayer: First, meditation, in which all the powers of the soul act naturally and freely; second, recollection, and the prayer of quiet in which the will is united to God, while the imagination and intellect remain free to help or hinder the delightful union; third, the state when these powers are also drawn into union, a union which causes an inebriation, a glorious folly, and leaves behind it greater effects than quietude; fourth, the stage when there is a complete union of all the powers, so that it is impossible to speak or read.

This description is psychological and as it stands recalls the regular marks and stages of the mystic experience. But the conventional pattern now becomes woven in somber colors and embroidered by the miraculous. False visions and strange locutions, against which St. Thomas warned, now reappear. After suffering for five hours with intolerable pains the Lord was pleased to make Theresa understand she is tempted by the devil; she saw him close by in the guise of a horrible little negro, gnashing his teeth in despair. Besides appearances of Satan there were messages or locutions from on high. According to Ribadeneira the Lord visited her and said: "If I had not created heaven, I would have done so for thy sake alone."

Such statements have repelled many. They seem like tawdry ornaments put over some altar of ancient and exquisite workmanship. But even Theresa's spiritual directors could not always suppress her valid experiences. In her last work, "The Spiritual Castle," she declares that, on reaching the seventh "mansion of the soul," she found to her astonishment that the abnormal psychological effects which had reached their culmination in ecstasy ceased or diminished, and that she could experience even higher communications than before, without any suspension of the bodily faculties.

This brings the mystic experience down to the normal. It makes it no longer magical or miraculous. But the authorities did not like this. They preferred the mystic in the prayer of rapture or ecstasy, when the memory is gone, the senses useless, the spiritual powers inoperative in any human mode. And yet these very aspects of devotional seizures at first puzzled Theresa's spiritual directors. They were at a loss for exact precedents. However, they were finally explained as divine visitations, and this by Francis Borgia, the future general of the Society of Jesus.

With this approval of the abnormal we can see why Rome accepted Theresa as a saint but condemned Molinos as a heretic. To have seizures even in public, to go into a cataleptic trance, to repeat the locutions and visions that had been suggested to the ear in the confessional, and to the eye in images and pictures, these things were concrete and valuable. On the contrary the other Spanish mystic Molinos, who reduced all the exercises of religion to simplicity of mind, and whose followers neglected corporeal austerities, relics, image worship, pilgrimages, the confessional and the mass, all this meant loss of revenue and positive menace to the spiritual dominance of the Jesuits.

With the tragic particulars of those condemned as quietists we are not concerned. General considerations are different: The interior or hidden way is hard to seek. Hence to say that this experience is right and that wrong, this orthodox and that not, in short to have only two categories for the protean truth, has all the weakness of any one-sided system. Hard and fast distinctions destroy the finer lines of reality. So, when many experiences, undergone by an accepted Saint like Theresa, were twisted and cramped to fit the Procrustes bed of orthodoxy, this but betrayed the fact that there had arisen within the church itself two kinds of theology, dogmatic and mystical, contending against each other.

This excessive simplification, this unfortunate dualism did much to obscure, distort, and even destroy valid mystic experience. The Jesuits actually denied the existence of the mystic theology. They reversed tradition itself in declaring that supernatural contemplation is the same as "vulgar mental prayer," only in a higher degree, and that the "simple intuition of God" is but a judgment of the reason following and completing a long chain of logic.

Such legalism is scholasticism run to seed. Hence scholasticism became a hindrance rather than a help to those who wished to devote themselves to what was so simply called "a loving attention to God." So the qualifications and caveats put forward by St. Thomas tended to arrest the flow of free spiritual activity. Ethical injunctions became legal injunctions in the literal sense; they stopped the very performance of mystical activity. When the mystic is told that his visions may be from the devil and his locutions from Lucifer, doubt and hesitation arise. But the genuine seeker, left alone, is capable of judging for himself what is true and what is false. He does not need to rely on the hair-splitting of the scholastics or the quibbles of the confessional. He is his own authority, his own spiritual guide. But this rôle of independence, this self-reliance such as that of the Brethren of the Free Spirit ran counter to the genius of the Latin church which relied on precedent and depended upon pressure to keep the course of thought within bounds. All we can say, then, is better "the dangerous heresies" of the Germanic branch of the Church, of Suso, of Tauler, of Ruysbroeck, than the directed visions, the suggested locutions of St. Theresa and of St. John of the Cross.

In fine, when the institution was put above the individual, when it tried to canalize, standardize and legalize, it lost by its very restrictive policies the contributions of fine characters like Molinos, Madame Guyon and Archbishop Fénélon. So a fatal distinction was made. Mysticism within limits might be allowed, quietism never. In a word, mysticism, becoming institutionalized, became sterile. And with the suppression of the quietists in the counter-reformation the stream of inspiration gradually dried up. Since the eighteenth century there have been several fine works on mysticism by scholars of the Romanic school, but these works are mere summaries of the past, retrospects over the bright surface of the distant brimming river.

IV

GERMANIC MYSTICISM

IV

GERMANIC MYSTICISM

The difference between the Romanic and Germanic types of mysticism is the difference between simplicity and complexity. The Latin spirit lends itself to over-simplification, the Teutonic to over-elaboration. Thus scholasticism tends to a religion of logic where ideas must square with the syllogism. In contrast, the Germanic mind is prone to flights of fancy and is not averse to obscurity.

The distinction is apparently racial and the two types of mind almost accord with their habitat. On the one hand there is the land of clear skies and classic architecture, on the other the cloudy north with its fogs and forests. As in literature there is a distinction between the classic and the romantic spirit, so in religion there is a distinction between the clear-cut Thomistic theology and the *Theologia Germanica*—that strange series of anonymous writings as dark and mysterious as the *Silva Germanica,* which spread north of the Alps and east of the Rhine.

In the Rhine region, then, there first emerge the figures of mystics like Suso and Tauler—members of the Roman Church, it is true, but in temperament different from the Latin spirit. Outwardly they kept to the doctrines, rites and ceremonies of Romanic origin, but inwardly they were enamored of the more obscure movements of the mind, seeking for flashes of insight in the darkness of the soul. Yet in their preference for the religion of the heart they sometimes were apt to lose their heads. They took up with occultism, dabbled in alchemy and astrology, and even had recourse to Cabbalism—the alleged secret doctrines of antiquity, the *arcana coelestia,* the heavenly secrets supposedly handed down from times as remote as those of Moses and Solomon. In brief the Germanic mysticism tended to theosophy and claimed to have a direct knowledge of divine things, gained in a mysterious way. So it is a far call from the mystic theology of St. Thomas, who attempts to rationalize the doctrine of direct awareness, to the "paradise-experiences" of Boehme who finds a double meaning in all things and is prone to discard the literal for the symbolic. Indeed the Teutonic mind is inclined to rejoice in "forests and enchantments drear, where more is meant than meets the ear."

This contrast could be carried further. It explains the friction between the men of the Reformation and the men of the Counter-Reformation, the former emphasizing liberty, the latter authority; the former priding themselves on freedom from restraint, the latter looking upon Luther and his successors as another barbarian horde from the North. And when Luther in his turn came to substitute the authority of Scripture for that of the church there arose a kind of Protestant Counter-Reformation, numerous sects that considered that the word was not in a book but in the heart, salvation not in adherence to texts but in cherishing the little flame within, the inner light most familiar to us in the teaching of the Quakers.

The Germanic type of mysticism in its broad aspects is difficult to portray, for it ranges in time from before the Reformation to the present day, and crops up in places as far apart as the Lake of Constance bordering Switzerland and the Lake of Mercy of Count Zinzendorf, the Bohemian scholar, in Connecticut. From the upper Rhine to the Low Countries, then across the Channel to England, and thence to America is one line of influence traced through Suso, Tauler, Ruysbroeck, and such disciples of the Belgian Brethren of the Common Life as Thomas à Kempis. Then later comes a different, though sometimes an intersecting line, from Boehme, the Silesian shoemaker, through the Seekers of the Continent and the British Commonwealth down to the spiritual reformers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including George Fox and the Society of Friends.

Thus through different centuries and through various countries there ran a steady though often subterranean stream of genuine mystic thought. Then from this stream, as from the fabled fountain of Arethusa which ran beneath the sea, there came waters bubbling up from one land to another—not only the Quaker contribution in America, but the less known doctrines of the Pennsylvania Pietists, originally from the Palatinate.

The migrations of the Germanic mysticism form a strange story. It began with what has been called the pantheism of the Rhine region; it ended, if it has ever ended, with the poetic pantheism of Walt Whitman, for in this modern American may be found traces of a remote past, and echoes of a distant land.

In general this whole historic type may be divided into two groups—the Catholic, beginning with Eckhart and followed by Suso, Tauler, and Ruysbroeck; the Protestant, starting about the time of the Familists, or Family of Love, and later dominated by that fantastic figure Jakob Boehme. The first group, of the fourteenth century, is still enmeshed in the doctrines and sacraments of the Latin Church; to these it holds, though with some difficulty and at times only by a forced logic. The second group denies the efficacy of these doctrines and sacraments and extends that denial not only to the Roman but also to the Protestant Church. To it faith consists neither in believing the facts of history nor in accepting metaphysical dogmas. Again the first group sought to carry on the traditions of the past. They saw no discrepancy between dogma and the inner life. Their temper was conservative and cautious and yet no one could say they were not seeking to concentrate all the forces of the soul upon a supernatural object. In reality this entire band finds in the sacraments the very ground or vehicle which carries them on in the mystic way. To them the Eucharist, for example, is both the symbol and the fact of the union between human and divine.

The second group is of a different temper. It rejects the outward and visible for the sake of the inward and spiritual. In doing this these men seem to many to be hasty, rash, and even iconoclastic. Yet between the genuine mystics of either group there is no real friction. Quietists do not quarrel. It is a question of temperament and of taste, and concerning tastes there is no dispute.

Now it would be a sheer perversion of the history of mysticism to say that either of these groups is more right than the other. Yet there is a tendency among interpreters or adherents of one or the other to become partisan. The advocates of the first, the sacramentarians, called the second iconoclasts, reckless destroyers of the church's beautiful forms and images. It may be true, as Boehme says, that God is not confined to "stone houses," but that gives no warrant for the destruction of a cathedral. The advocates of the second group at times speak as if forms of beauty and fair images were worthless, empty husks bereft of meaning, forgetting that whatever calls out the feeeling of sacred and intimate union is thereby of high value. Such may be satisfied with the plain meeting house, the unadorned edifice, but that, in turn, is no warrant for disparaging those who love music and color—the solemn organ note, the storied window richly dight.

Now it is the glory of genuine mysticism that it is generous. It can see value in whatever elicits the feeling of unity with the beloved object. We cannot say that the means do not matter since the end is everything. Rather we should say that, if the end be attained, the means thereto are important, whether these be a meditation upon the Trinity, or the tea ceremony of a Buddhist sect; whether the searching of Scriptures, or the worship of nature. "All thoughts, all passions, all delights, whatever stirs this mortal frame, all are but ministers of love"—as the poet truly puts it.

Turn then to Eckhart, foremost of the Germanic mystics and we see this thing—a change as to the meaning, but a common purpose with the mystics of the past. The new symbolism shows this. The figure of the ladder is now supplanted by that of the spark, the living flame which unites the human spirit with the divine. This is perhaps a better, because a simpler symbol, for it avoids the endless gradations of both the earthly and heavenly hierarchies. So without intermediaries between man and God the mystic stands on the dividing line between the medieval and modern ways of thinking. The old emanation theory offered an ever lengthening chain between God and nature, between nature and man. The new theory, that of immanence, tended to a coalescence of the three entities. Furthermore, by making the relations more intimate, it opened two fresh fields of endeavor. There was the field in which the practical seeker after the divine light could find it reflected in his own soul. There was also the field in which the speculative mystic could find traces of the divine activity in the forms of nature. Thus may be traced two influences coming from the Master—as Eckhart was called. There were those who like the Quakers sought in simplicity of heart the light within. There were those who like the Cambridge Platonists sought with great learning and ingenuity signs and symbols of the indwelling divine spirit in the world, that "glass in which God reflects His glory." These were the "analogy loving souls" ranging from Quarles and Vaughan and Lord Herbert of Cherbury to a Victorian poet like Wordsworth, who sought "a something far more deeply interfused," in the round ocean and the living air. As literary craftsmen they furnished the pure gold in the golden treasury of English verse.

Yet in these two fields, on the one hand the practical and devotional, on the other the speculative and poetic, strange crops often sprang up. For instance, the Brethren of the Free Spirit were at times too free in casting off all restraint. They tended to think that they were a law unto themselves. Here the Ranters, in flouting the authorities both civil and ecclesiastical, committed such excesses as were found in the Anabaptist disturbances and the Peasants' War. Other extremists of the opposite, the speculative type, were men like Jakob Boehme, who in seeking for symbolisms in nature followed the false analogies of theosophy, of alchemy, of astrology, and other pseudo-sciences, and lost themselves in a swamp of vain speculation.

In all this confused traffic it is hard to steer a middle course and to keep to the true range lights. Yet the steady pilots of the soul ever had in mind these two things,—the light of nature within, and the light of nature without,—the little spark in the soul of the individual and that "divine glory shining out upon the creation . . . that divine wisdom which contrived and beautified this glorious structure," as one of the English Platonists expressed it.

To turn back to the introspective mystics. It was the divine beam in the heart of man upon which Eckhart's gaze was directed. This conception enabled him to go far. By it he united God and the soul. As the divine light does not stop at its source, but irradiates all creatures, so on their part those creatures may be considered as necessary reflectors of the divine glory. Once Eckhart is so bold as to say: "This spark, it is God," and again: "The eye with which I see God is the same as that with which He sees me."

This sounds rash and was seized upon by the Inquisitors, after Eckhart's death, as a doctrine to be condemned. Yet logically this boldness is justified; it is only a strong statement of the doctrine of coalescence. If there is a light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world, and if God is the Father of Lights, Eckhart would have scriptural warrant for his statement. Further, he identifies this "spark" with the highest reason, and reason, he adds, "presses ever upwards and must penetrate to the ground from whence all goodness and wisdom springs . . . Here God's ground is my ground, and my ground God's ground."

With the doctrine of the inner life as the bond or link between human and divine Eckhart's successors were in hearty agreement. In fact, Ruysbroeck declared that "contemplative men are one with the same light by which they see and which they see."

Is this an over-weening attempt at self-deification? Against such a possibility the anonymous author of the *Theologia Germanica* uttered a warning: "The false light dreameth itself to be God, and taketh to itself what belongeth to God as God is in eternity without the creature . . . It thinketh and declareth itself to be above all works, words, customs, laws and order and above that life which Christ led in the body, which He possessed in His holy human nature." However, in defense of his notion, Eckhart on his part reasons thus: "I place a mirror in the sunlight. The sun sends out its light without losing any of its substance, and the reflection of the mirror sends back sunlight. Sun and reflection are the same thing. So it is with God. God with His own nature, His essence, His Godhead, is in the soul, and yet He is not the soul, that is, He is infinitely more than the soul." From this it is evident that Eckhart is not guilty of the fallacy of substitution, nor of putting the part for the whole. His calling the spark "the little glimmer of the soul" indicates that he does not confuse it with the divine radiance.

Eckhart at first sight may appear inconsistent.

It seems as if what he gave with one hand he took away with the other. But for this there was a reason. He was at the critical point between two diverging tendencies. The older mysticism tended towards the *via negativa* and there are many traces of this in him. The newer mysticism tended towards anti-nomianism, or contempt for laws, rules, regulations. Now Eckhart would bring about a resolution of forces between these two conflicting tendencies. In speaking of the Godhead as "The Nameless Nothing" he would remove all human traits from divinity. However, this does not mean that he would so dehumanize man as to make him an entire participant in the divine nature. By his figurative distinction between God as the Sun and man as the mere reflected spark he is able to meet certain conclusions of those who would deify humanity, and raise it above all restraints. Against such the Master says: "There are people who say, if I have God and His love, I may do what I like. This is a false idea of liberty. When thou wishest a thing contrary to God and His law thou hast not the love of God in thee."

Eckhart is the dominant figure in Germanic mysticism. He stands on the water-shed between the past and the future. On his speculative side he deals with the difficulties handed down from the age of the quietistic Dionysius; on the practical he stands for the free flow of the spiritual life. The latter influence is the strongest upon his successors, the important trio, Suso, Tauler and Ruysbroeck, who come before Boehme, the great symbolist. These men furnished certain ideas which were to have considerable vogue. Suso found that his harsh ascetic practices were of little avail. He therefore had recourse to the eternal wisdom as personified in the Book of Proverbs in female form. This figure of Sophia is a strange one and may be traced to much later times as the Woman of the Wilderness sought after by certain Pennsylvania Pietists. Tauler in turn had an influence upon the Quakers or Society of Friends, for he makes much of the inner light and was at one time the center of that mystical group of the upper Rhine known as the Friends of God. Of this trio Ruysbroeck, the Flemish mystic, is perhaps the most significant. He was the link between the Friends of God and the later community of the Brethren of the Common Life and to this community belonged Thomas à Kempis. It is in the mirror of the Son, says Ruysbroeck, that every man may see the eternal image of God, and it is this "immortal pattern" that doubtless suggested the *Imitation of Christ.*

Such flowers as these in the garden of the contemplative life were succeeded by a crop of weeds. Admirable types, Eckhart, the Master, and Ruysbroeck, Doctor Ecstaticus, were followed by aberrant species, the riotous growth of whose fancies well-nigh choked the ground. Such were Valentin Weigel and Jakob Boehme. The former was a Lutheran pastor influenced by Paracelsus, otherwise known as Theophrastus Bombastus, who was in turn affected by the Cabbala or occult philosophy of the Jews. The disciples of this curious genius sought not only sermons in stones but significance in everything. Thus the shamrock to them was a symbol of the Trinity, the spider of the devil, and so on through the animal, vegetable and even the mineral kingdom. But beside these childish fancies, these easy and silly analogies, there were harder problems to be solved by occult symbolism. Such was Weigel's speculations concerning man as a microcosm or little world, and man's three-fold nature —the outward material body, the astral body—a kind of spiritual shell of that body—and the immortal soul which bears the image of the divinity.

These speculations were taken over by

Boehme, the shoemaker of Silesia. The Anglican Bishop Warburton declared that they "would disgrace Bedlam at full moon," and John Wesley, as if in reference to the very name of Paracelsus, called them "inimitable bombast." But the calling of names does not explain how the human mind functions and Boehme stands for a type of thought which is a persistent type—like it or not as we may. To divide the total universe, visible and invisible, into celestial, astral, and terrestrial, furnishes that thrill of the three-fold which so curiously affects many minds. Such minds are not satisfied with the sheer dogma of the creation of matter by mind. The logical leap is too great, therefore the gap is to be bridged artificially by an extra world, a two-fold world which partakes of the nature of both matter and mind. Taken literally, as astral, it is celestial and spiritual; taken figuratively it is a form, mold or pattern of spiritual stuff, a shadowy matrix from which all that is visible comes forth.

Thus, they declare, is the eternal problem of duality to be solved by triplicity, there being inserted a mesh of relations which is shadowed in spiritual form upon the empty screen of the material. The very doctrine of signatures suggest this. There is a sign, a symbol, a character impressed upon every known object, an impress of divinity upon mundane things. So the intermediate astral world becomes a way of escape out of the dilemma of dualism. It is a sort of smoke-screen for hazy minds, a vapory mass of attenuated matter which may contain all sorts of figures in vague outline.

This way of thinking is intellectually perilous; in that no man's land of insubstantial forms lurks danger. Who can tell what will come forth? Is not one imagining as valid as another? Cannot the astral world be a storehouse of nonsense as well as of sense? Cannot it contain fantastic fancies as well as logical forms? These were the questions constantly directed against the symbolists. Those of sound mind, poets with the artistic temperament, might utilize this extra world of images. "The eye reads omens as it goes, and speaks all languages the rose," so Emerson suggested. This contrivance might be safe and sane for the healthy-minded, but the sickly-minded might use, and did use this magic code in order to startle and frighten their day and generation. The Cabbalists, as they were generally called, expressed wild surmises as to impending evils and read strange portents in the skies of their imagination. They prophesied dire catastrophes and were ever prone to interpret the signs of the times as presaging the speedy end of this very world which they set out to explain. Such Cabbalism, as prophetic insight, is sometimes identified with mysticism. But it is far different in spirit from genuine, spiritual illumination. The Cabbalist was too often tempted to startle men's minds. The mystic, as quietist, by very definition, allayed the spirit of unrest. He was no prophet of woe, no disturber of the peace. Instead of the lightnings of apocalyptic wrath he sought the inner light, the little candle of peace and good will shining towards all men.

In other words, the Cabbalist too often tended to become the ranter, whereas the spiritual illuminate sought as his end the attaining of quiet frames of mind. It was then a cruel confusion of logic which made out that the mystic had a touch of madness in his make-up. Those who ran wildly through the streets crying out that the end of the world was at hand were miles apart from genuine Quietists like the Quakers, those members of the Society of Friends, who were so admired for their "sweet and innocent deportment."

Now Boehme was not of this type, nor was he modest in his speculative opinions. A comparison with a more modern thinker will show this. According to Kant we dwell on an island of the phenomenal, surrounded by the fog bank of the noumenal, that is, we dwell amidst appearances which we may know, but we do not know things in themselves. Yet Boehme presumed to grasp the latter. He says that it is as if a mist were before thine eyes, yet the eye of the spirit can penetrate this mist. What is found, then, in this invisible universe? Many strange things, he replied. This abysmal universe is a double universe of light and darkness. From it has come forth the temporal, material world, which, like its "Mother," is a double world of good and evil. There are common qualities in both the inner and outer universe. The first quality is "desire" which always disturbs the quiet, bringing contraction, negation and darkness. The second is "attractive, gravitating." These two diverse tendencies, struggling one against the other, bring strain and tension. To this, the third quality "tension," is added a fourth. This is the "flash" or ignition caused by the collision between nature and spirit. Next a light, springing from ignition, reveals the lower force-forms, the "fire-forms." On its inner or spiritual side this quality of light is "amiable and blessed Love." But enough of this. The seventh or final quality is body or "figure," the tendency to expression in actuality or concrete form. From all this rigmarole it seems as if the Germanic occultism has run mad. It is a kind of Wagnerian nightmare of metaphysical subtleties, a Walpurgis night of fantastic forms, a danse macabre of dry and rattling categories—about as far away, let us say, from the Greek quest of the absolute good, true and beautiful, as a mad house is from the groves of Academe.

The works of Boehme remind one of the most fantastic etchings of Dürer, say that of Melancholia. While the latter are the products of a finished art, ever marked by the firmness of the bitten line, Boehme's lines of thought are slurred, obscured, confused. His works are a kind of Cabbalistic cobweb pulled awry, threads of thought out of all connection, a mighty maze and never with a plan. A mind that can include colors, smells and taste under the "sixth quality, sound," is a mind with which one can have no point of engagement. But we have almost lost our way. Let us return to it. The old Dionysian road of negation, as we have said, led up to a blank wall; this Cabbalistic road leads to a ruined wall, made of materials once sound but since spoiled by careless handling. In all this one can find traces of Platonic archetype and ectypes, of Aristotle's matter and form—but there is no logical mortar in the whole construction, no rhyme or reason despite the talk of harmony and purpose in the whole.

All this is the kind of logical obstruction that Boehme had to surmount and these the materials that his followers had to utilize in order to build themselves a retreat in which to meditate. Strangely enough both he and they succeeded in this to some degree. The rubbish drawn from various quarters, from the Cabbala to Paracelsus, served as a shelter for the inner light, the "Fuenklein," the little sparkle of the divine splendor. So out of Boehme's many dark sayings we occasionally find a passage like this: "While I was in affliction and trouble, I elevated my spirit, and earnestly raised it up unto God as with a great stress and onset, lifting up my whole heart and mind and will and resolution to wrestle with the love and mercy of God and not to give over unless He blessed me—then the spirit did break through."

This passage from the *Aurora*, or the Morning Glow, is typical of Germanic mysticism in the dark days of civil and sectarian strife. Leave aside the seven qualities and all their impossible transitions and there remains a single constructive conception. This is that the universe is two-fold, of double aspect. Like a piece of leather with which Boehme cobbled shoes there is a rough side and a smooth side to things. On the one hand there is the material, the sensuous, the evil; on the other the spiritual, the super-sensuous, the good. The two are always conjoined. Yet there is the hope that the rough may be made smooth. The forms of nature and the forms of life may be but the incarnation of the spirit, could we but see them aright. As Paracelsus and others before him obscurely taught, there is a spiritual significance in all objects. Indeed many things have signatures, visibly marked upon them, impressions of the divine signet of the creating spirit. However crudely expressed by Boehme this conception is one which is ever of interest to seekers after the significance of natural objects. Plato sought it in the relation of the ectype to the archetype, of the faint copy to the supreme reality, such as the fair curve of beauty which suggests the complete geometrical figure. Emerson at the other end of the long procession of seekers after natural beauty put the problem in this way. Taking the old figure, that the visible world and the relation of its parts is the dial plate of the invisible, he adds that the universe becomes transparent and the light of higher laws than its own shines through it.

Plato and Emerson are two aristocrats among the symbolists of nature. To these must be added other names, especially the Cambridge Platonists, the English scholars who formed the connecting link between the Germanic mysticism and the transcendentalists over seas. But these men belong more properly to the last, the Anglo-American group, who in various ways have sought a "close and ineffable conformity with the Divine Mind."

V

ANGLO-AMERICAN MYSTICISM

V

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The contribution of the Anglo-American mystics is that of the worship of nature. As Emerson might say, they came forth into the azure and worshiped the day. It is with them no longer a closet philosophy; ascetic practices largely cease, and medieval morbidities evaporate in the open air. To them nature becomes a great symbol to be interpreted, for behind the fair face of the landscape there is a hidden meaning.

In the early part of this period there were of course those who sought to flee this world as a vain apparition, those even who talked of this world as a vale of tears. But this Puritanic tone was not the usual one. In spite of the conventional cant of Calvinism the seekers after the inner life often broke forth into rhapsodies over the lovely aspects of mountain and valley, of forest and stream. And taking in the golden treasury of English poetry there is a glittering line of nature mystics, from Vaughan, and Quarles and Herbert to Blake, and Francis Thompson and Wordsworth. To this wealth of genuine mystic thought should be added the American seers of symbolism—Jonathan Edwards, the Saint of New England, Woolman, the Quaker, Emerson in part, and above all Walt Whitman—at times over vehement, but always enamored of nature, from the humblest leaves of grass to the great plains and mighty rivers of his native land.

And now for the historic connections. The object of the medieval mystics was to seek the country of the supernatural—It is about us—declared the nature mystics. Boehme as the father of Protestant mysticism had laid perhaps too much stress on the inner life. His English disciple, William Law, marks the change from subjectivism to symbolism. To him corresponding to the inner spiritual universe there is an outer, visible world. So, as Law says,—all that is sweet, delightful and amiable in the world, in the serenity of air, the fineness of seasons, the joy of light, the melody of sounds, the beauty of colors, the fragrance of smells, the splendor of precious stones, is nothing else but heaven breaking through the veil of this world.

Thoughts similar to these were taken up by the Cambridge Platonists who looked down upon Boehme and his disciples as "enthusiasts" and sought to give a rational basis for such sentiments. As followers of Plato, in the great English University, they held that the very essences of material things are not dead but living, being nothing but modifications of mind or intellect. These essences, or universal notions, being immutable cannot be eternal without an eternal mind. They had a being before the material world, and all particular intellects were created. There is, therefore, an eternal wisdom and knowledge in the world, and it is the privilege of man even with his partial faculties, to seek this wisdom and knowledge. Such is the reasoning of Cudworth who quaintly adds: "All understandings are constantly furnished with forms, being printed all over at once with the seeds of universal knowledge."

This is theoretical Platonism. Other members of the Cambridge group made it practical. John Smith asks: "What do you return within to see? A soul confined within the private and narrow cells of its own particular being? Such a soul deprives itself of all that almighty and essential glory and goodness which shines round about it. No, the mind is not like a hermit sequestered from all things else, for God made the universe and all the creatures contained therein as so many glasses wherein he might reflect his own glory. . . . Good men may easily find every creature pointing out to that Being whose image and superscription he bears and climb up from these darker resemblances of the Divine wisdom and goodness . . . Thus may a man walk up and down the world as in a garden of spices, and suck a Divine sweetness out of every flower. There is a two-fold meaning in every creature, a literal and a mystical and one is but the ground of the other."

Utterances like these had been made long before. Just prior to Boehme there was Valentin Weigel who had taught that everything is double, that the external world is a replica of the internal, that even man, as a microcosm, is a reflection of the greater universe or macrocosm. This idea had been repeated by the Cambridge Platonist, John Smith, in his statement that God made the universe and all the creatures contained therein as so many glasses wherein He might reflect His own glory.

The fact that the German enthusiast and the English scholar had similar notions as to the double meaning of natural objects, is but proof of the wide spread of that manner of thinking. This was the age of quaint emblems, the time when symbolism was in the air. The divine language of signs was studied by many. One typical case is that of Richard Franck, the Cromwellian tutor who fell under the two-fold influence of Cabbalism and the Cambridge school. By Cabbalism is meant that esoteric Jewish philosophy which fused the Old Testament upon Neo-Platonism and sought by an allegorical interpretation of Scripture to penetrate nature's stupendous secrets. All this is reflected in Franck's curious work in which he treats of the mirror of wisdom, the fair frontispiece of the beautiful creation—"This embellished Creation being the Almighty Common Place Book, wherein we may read His Divine Operations, legible and intelligible to our capacity; this stupendous Creation wherein God has made Himself obvious to the Creature, the copious Volume and visible Folio of God the Creator . . . over which great School God Himself is chief Rabbi, whose Students and Proselytes are Nature and Religion." This quaint treatise, "writ in America in a Time of Solitude," is to be taken as proof of the broad reach of symbolism, of the doctrine of double meaning, for it declares in true Platonic fashion that "in the beautiful face of the firmament we observe the invisibility of things made visible."

Stripped of the fantastic the doctrine of divine immanence is then the principle at the bottom of nature mysticism. This principle was carried over seas. From Jonathan Edwards to Ralph Waldo Emerson we have native Americans who considered natural objects to be but faint copies of invisible archetypes, and the world as the present expositor of the Divine mind. With Edwards, the Puritan divine, the fetters of his iron creed were loosened by his love of nature. Publicly he was known as the author of that dreadful Enfield sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Privately he was no pessimist. The reading of the Cambridge Platonists was for him an antidote to the sorry view of this world as a platform of the divine wrath. Professional Puritanism was one thing, personal belief another. Now this precocious genius, at the age of sixteen or seventeen, had defined the substance of all bodies as "the infinitely exact, and precise, and perfectly stable Idea, in God's mind, together with His stable Will, that the same shall gradually be communicated to us, and to other minds, according to certain fixed and exact established Methods and Laws."

It was this youthful notion of substance that gave Edwards his sense of oneness with his physical environment. Even some two or three years before this he had asked himself what it was that "the sleeping rocks dream of," and in his later diary he recounts this experience: "After this my sense of divine things gradually increased, and became more and more lively, and had more of that inward sweetness. The appearance of everything was altered; there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything. God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything; in the sun, moon, and stars; in the clouds, and the blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees, in the water, and all nature; which used greatly to fix my mind. I often used to sit and view the moon for continuance; and in the day, spent much time viewing the clouds and sky, to behold the sweet glory of God in these things; in the meantime, singing forth, with a low voice, my contemplations of the Creator and Redeemer. And scarce any thing, among all the works of nature was so sweet to me as thunder and lightning; formerly, nothing had been so terrible to me. Before, I used to be uncommonly terrified with thunder and to be struck with terror when I saw a thunder-storm rising: but now, on the contrary, it rejoiced me. I felt God, so to speak, at the first appearance of a thunder-storm; and used to take the opportunity, at such times, to fix myself in order to view the clouds, and see the lightnings play, and hear the majestic and awful voice of God's thunder which oftentimes was exceedingly entertaining, leading me to sweet contemplations of my great and glorious God. While thus engaged, it always seemed natural to me to sing, or chant forth my meditations; or, to speak my thoughts in soliloquies with a singing voice. Holiness, as I then wrote down some of my contemplations on it, appeared to me to be of a sweet, pleasant, charming, serene calm nature; which brought an inexpressible purity, brightness, peacefulness, and ravishment to the soul. In other words, that it made the soul like a field or garden of God, with all manner of pleasant flowers; all pleasant, delightful and undisturbed; enjoying a sweet calm, and the gently vivifying beams of the sun. The soul of a true Christian, as I then wrote my meditations, appeared like such a little white flower as we see in the spring of the year; low, and humble on the ground, opening its bosom, to receive the pleasant beams of the sun's glory; rejoicing, as it were, in a calm rapture; diffusing around a sweet fragrancy; standing peacefully and lovingly, in the midst of other flowers round about; all in like manner opening their bosoms, to drink in the light of the sun."

The New England divine possessed a delicate sense of symbolism based upon the kinship of man and nature. The same sense was possessed by the New Jersey tailor, John Woolman. This Quaker mystic argues "that, as the mind was moved, by an inward principle, to love God as an invisible, incomprehensible Being; by the same principle it was moved to love Him in all His manifestations in the visible world. . . . That, as by His breath, the flame of life was kindled in all animal, sensible creatures, to say we love God as unseen, and, at the same time, exercise cruelty toward the least creature, moving by his life, or by life derived from him, was a contradiction in itself."

This extension of the principle of natural sensibility now leads Woolman to a recital of certain "heavenly openings" in respect to the care and providence of the Almighty over His creatures in general, and over man as the most noble amongst them. In his Journal, which the poet

Whittier called a classic of the inner life, Woolman recalled how as a boy his conscience had pricked him for robbing a bird's nest, how his heart went out in pity to the horses and oxen with their tired eyes and how he was led to repent copying a bill of sale of a negro woman. Now this sense of kinship towards all creatures is carried into the practical field. From his meditations, his "silent frames," he extends his principle of sensibility from nature to human nature. To him all men have a common stamp, there is the same divine signature upon all. This being so he believes that liberty is the natural right of all men equally. Therefore he is led to write "Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes Recommended to the Professors of Christianity of Every Denomination." Here his arguments are simple but effective. He puts himself in the place of the slave and argues in this fashion: "Should we consider ourselves present as spectators, when cruel negroes privately catch innocent children, who are employed in the fields; hear their lamentable cries, under the most terrifying apprehensions; or should we look upon it as happening in our own families, having our children carried off by savages, we must needs own that such proceedings are contrary to the nature of Christianity."

With this principle of universal sympathy Woolman goes further. He seeks to undermine not only slavery "that great building raised by degrees from small beginnings in error," but he attacks war itself. If slaves are "contraband to Christ," so much the more is a spirit of fierceness and the love of dominion contrary to a spirit of meekness, gentleness, and heavenly wisdom. The wrong spirit he had in mind was that against the Indians. Woolman is of like mind with William Penn and in sympathy with "The Friendly Association for Gaining and Preserving Peace with the Indians by Pacific Measures." Consequently he argued in behalf of the aborigines that: "Since their way of life requiring much room hath been transferred to them from their predecessors, we have little right to plead, as members of one great family, the equity of their assigning to us more of their possessions and living in a way requiring less room." These reasonings led Woolman to take his life in his hands, to journey through the very Wyoming valley which was the scene of massacre, and all that he might be brought "into nearer sympathy with the natives and their misfortunes and disabilities. Such was their having been induced, for the sake of gain, to waste their skins and furs in purchasing a liquor to the ruin of them and their families."

Woolman may be counted a reformer, but it was no harsh ascetic temper that led him to write his "Word of Remembrance and Caution to the Rich" and his "Considerations on the True Harmony of Mankind." This latter remarkable tractate advocates a sort of economic disarmament, including an eight-hour day, a limitation of luxuries, a boycotting of slave-made goods, and a lessening of swollen fortunes. Woolman had few followers. He founded no order like that of the Franciscans, yet he was of like spirit with the reformer of Assisi, because of a common principle of sensibility, a common sense of kinship with all living creatures from the humblest to the highest.

A different type of mystic is Ralph Waldo Emerson—interpreter of nature. As a philosopher he gives the reason for the faith that was within Woolman. When the Quaker is marked by an innocent simplicity, the New England transcendentalist is sophisticated, in the sense of thoroughly knowing his subject. As a scholar he is especially familiar with what the English poets had had to say regarding sense symbolism and the divine visual language. From Quarles and Vaughan and especially George Herbert he was ever wont to quote lines that taught the congruity between things and thoughts, between ideas and mind. He knew, too, that from Cudworth to Coleridge there was a succession of thinkers who considered that words are the signs of natural facts; that particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts; that every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of mind, for man is conscious of a universal soul within or behind his individual life; that nature is the symbol of spirit, for it is emblematic; and lastly, that the universe becomes transparent, with a light of higher laws than its own shining through it.

Taking the old figure, that the visible world and the relation of its parts is the dial plate of the invisible, Emerson now proceeds to the principles upon which this figure is based. The first principle is monism, which means not only the unity of the world in God, but the immanence of God in the world. On the one hand, nature is the expositor of the divine mind; on the other, man is the soul of the whole, of the Eternal One. A second belief is that of the microcosm—because of the indwelling of divinity, every part of the world, however small, is held to contain within itself all the laws and meaning of the universe:—Man is conscious of a universal soul within his individual life, he is an analogist and studies relations in all objects: placed in the center of beings, a ray of relation passes from every other being to him. A third belief is that of the macrocosm, which holds that the soul of each individual is identical with the soul of the world and contains latently all which it contains:—Man is a universal mirror; every rational creature is entitled to partake of the soul of the world by his constitution. A final belief is that of symbolism. The transcendentalist holds that nature is the embodiment of spirit in the world of sense; nature is a great picture to be appreciated, a great book to be read.

As an interpreter of nature, as a seer of symbols in this great picture, Emerson was succeeded by Walt Whitman, the last of the American trio. There was Woolman in his innocent simplicity, Emerson in his refined sophistication, and now comes the author of "Leaves of Grass" who described himself as "one of the roughs." This American bard brooding in "the large and thoughtful night" is a figure inscrutable and even repellant to many. Yet he possessed a definite philosophy and is to be put among the mystics. In particular he has been marked by what has been called the cosmic consciousness, the feeling that the world about him possesses an inner life and meaning. At the start Whitman asks himself this question: "After you have exhausted what there is in business, politics, conviviality, love, and so on—have found that none of these finally satisfy, or permanently wear—what remains? Nature remains; to bring out from their torpid recesses the affinities of a man or woman with the open air, the trees, fields, the changes of seasons—the sun by day, the stars of heaven by night. We will begin from these convictions. Literature flies so high and is so hotly spiced, that our notes may seem hardly more than breaths of common air, or draughts of water to drink. But that is part of our lesson. Dear, soothing, healthy, restoration-hours—after three confining years of paralysis—after the long strain of the war, and its wounds and death."

Such was the practice of the poet's life. His theory was one that insisted upon the unity and all-comprehensiveness of true being. Here the finite world is a mode, part or aspect of one eternal absolute being, a unity which may be called indifferently God or nature. In the latter case nature is both cause and effect: creator and creature are indistinguishable. As Emerson put it, nature is house at once and architect. In fine, the absolute, the one, is that all-embracing, all-enfolding inexhaustible being of which man, beast, plant and all the elements are partial, but closely kindred manifestations.

All this is summed up in one of Whitman's musings: "Doubtless there comes a time—perhaps it has come to me—when one feels through his whole being, and pronouncedly the emotional part, that identity between himself subjectively and Nature objectively which Schelling and Fichte are so fond of pressing. How it is I know not, but I often realize a presence here—in clear moods I am certain of it, and neither chemistry nor reasoning nor esthetics will give the least explanation. All the past two summers it has been strengthening and nourishing my sick body and soul, as never before. Thanks, invisible physician, for the silent delicious medicine, the day and night, thy waters and thy airs, the banks, the grass, the trees, and e'en the weeds!"

This special sense of a presence has been called the cosmic consciousness. As one of Whitman's friends puts it: "Let us see what we know about this new sense, state, faculty, function or whatever it may be called. It appears principally (perhaps always) in the prime of life, in superior persons belonging to the most advanced races—that is, it appears in the foremost individuals of the race. It comes suddenly, like a flash, just as self-consciousness does—though this last comes so early in life that comparatively few recollect, in later years, its on-coming; and when we think of it, it does not seem possible that consciousness, self-consciousness, or cosmic consciousness could well come any other way than per saltum. Simultaneously with, or instantly following, the above sense and emotional experiences, there comes to the person whom we are describing a clear conception in outline, of the drift of the universe—a consciousness that the overruling power which resides in it is infinitely beneficent: a vision of the whole, or, at least of an immense whole, which dwarfs all conception, imagination, or speculation springing from and belonging to ordinary self-consciousness, making the old attempts to mentally grasp the universe and its meaning petty and even ridiculous. Along with the above comes what must be called, for want of a better term, a sense of immortality. This is not an intellectual conviction: it is far more simple and elementary, and could better be compared to the certainty of distinct individuality which comes with and belongs to self-consciousness."

To this somewhat abstract presentment there needs but be added another of Whitman's own musings. In one of the most significant passages from his prose works he gives what may well be called a true summary of nature mysticism. After certain meditations upon the banks of the Hudson, he declares: "I am convinced there are hours of Nature, especially of the atmosphere, mornings and evenings, address'd to the soul. Night transcends, for that purpose, what the proudest day can do. Now, indeed, if never before, the heavens declared the glory of God. It was to the full the sky of the Bible, of Arabia, of the prophets, and of the oldest poems. There, in abstraction and stillness, (I had gone off by myself to absorb the scene, to have the spell unbroken,) the copiousness, the removedness, vitality, loose-clear-crowdedness, of that stellar concave spreading overhead, softly absorb'd into me, rising so free, interminably high, stretching east, west, north, south—and I, though but a point in the centre below, embodying all."

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